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ABSTRACT

A descriptive study was undertaken to determine students' reactions to and perceptions of required field-based experiences as a component of teacher training. Using a researcher-designed instrument, data were obtained from 140 undergraduate students at the conclusion of their directed teaching semester. The instrument measured five components of field experience: placement, supervising teacher attributes, university feedback/course content, amount/variety of placements, and professional value. Means were calculated for the overall scale and for each of 25 subscales. In addition, specific items of the instrument were analyzed for significance and trend. The results of the study indicated that there were statistically significant differences in student reactions to field experiences as determined by major, in particular, between administrator/secondary education and childhood education. The survey instrument and data tables are included in appendices. (Author/ND)

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**FIELD EXPERIENCES AS A COMPONENT
OF THE TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAM:
STUDENT REACTIONS**

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Abstract

A descriptive study was undertaken to determine the reactions and perceptions of students to required field-based experiences as a component of teacher training. Using a researcher-designed instrument, data was obtained from 140 undergraduate students at the conclusion of their directed teaching semester. The instrument measured five components of field experience: Placement, Supervising Teacher Attributes, University Feedback/Course Content, Amount/Variety of Placements, and Professional Value. Means were calculated for the overall scale and for each subscale. In addition, specific items of the instrument were analyzed for significance and trend. The results of the study indicated that there were statistically significant differences in student reactions to field experience as determined by major.

The professional education faculty at the University of Central Arkansas (UCA) is committed to providing a learning experience which is conducive to the development of teachers who are, upon completion of their respective program, prepared to enter the classroom teaching environment. In addition, students completing the teacher education program at UCA should have developed a keen awareness of the realities of teaching in today's changing world of education. UCA's professional education faculty members define their mission as one of preparing educators who perform as professionals, who possess the desire to advance the quality of education and educational environments, and who observe, and respond to student needs and educational change.

In keeping with these goals, newly-designed professional education curricula were implemented in the fall of 1992. These curricula resulted from a fifteen-month analysis of the course work and requirements by all UCA faculty responsible for professional education course work.

The resulting design reflected two basic curricular objectives:

1. Establishment of a "core" curriculum designed to ensure that all students graduating from the basic professional preparatory program and master of science in education program possessed a "common" set of learning experiences deliberately selected by the professional education faculty.
2. Establishment of specific programs of study based upon the essentials identified by the faculty germane to those programs.

Essentials are organized within a framework of three domains: the profession, the learner, and the tools. Each of these domains is characterized by two dimensions: knowledge and experience. In the knowledge dimension, the essentials are introduced, expanded, and applied.

The experience dimension establishes opportunities for observation and participation in order to achieve a synthesis of theory and practice. With the cooperation of professionals in the field, courses were designed to ensure congruence between course content and field experiences.

The new curriculum requires all professional education students at the undergraduate level to complete a core of six courses (16 semester hours) in which the essentials and knowledge bases which support those courses are addressed. These courses are:

- EDUC 1210 Education Profession (ADSE)
- EDUC 2310 Child/Adolescent Development (CHED)
- EDUC 2320 Exceptional & Culturally Diverse Student Populations (SPED)
- EDUC 3301 History & Philosophy of Education (ADSE)
- EDUC 3220 Education Technology (EMLS)
- EDUC 3310 Applied Learning (PSYCH)

Upon admission to the teacher education program, students extend their knowledge by completing one of three strands of professional studies: elementary education, secondary education, or special education. Classroom-based clinical and field-based experiences are critical elements throughout the total teacher education program. Through careful structuring of course work requirements, a progression of systematically designed exploratory, developmental, and synthesizing activities are ensured for all students. These activities are designed to take place in a variety of settings including rural, urban, and suburban, thus affording opportunities for all students to interact with culturally diverse and exceptional student populations.

The exploratory experiences using both observation and participation are designed to introduce students to the roles and responsibilities of the classroom teacher, to the realities of the classroom environment, and to the skills, values, and attitudes essential to successful teaching.

Direct experiences with learners are required. These varied opportunities assist teacher education students to affirm their choices about teaching as a career choice.

The developmental experiences are designed to provide direct interaction with learners and classroom teachers. These experiences include developing student profiles, individual and small-group tutoring, and identifying the unique instructional needs of exceptional and culturally diverse learners. The primary goal here is to assist the student in forming and refining basic instructional skills.

The synthesizing experiences require the application of principles and theories learned throughout the teacher education program and assist students in internalizing and transferring what they have previously learned into actual practice. A goal here is to allow the student to develop a personalized teaching style and to clarify philosophies of education. Synthesizing experiences are provided primarily through the directed teaching semester which consists of two eight week placements for each student.

Total field experience clock hours for teacher education students at UCA range from a low of 684 hours for Secondary Education majors to a high of 786 hours for Childhood Education majors. (Table 1.)

Description of the Study

Historically, field-based teacher education programs have been found primarily in those programs serving a limited number of students. Although the University of Central Arkansas has the largest teacher training program in the state, in response to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) standards, the university revamped its teacher education curriculum to reflect an increased emphasis on field experiences as an essential component. One question which frequently surfaced among involved faculty and administrators was how those students enrolled in teacher education preparatory courses viewed this dramatic increase in required field experiences. While this is obviously a legitimate concern, there had been no serious inquiry into the question prior to the initiation of the following descriptive study.

During the spring semester of the 1994-95 academic year, a study was initiated to determine student reactions to field experiences as a major component of their teacher education program at UCA. Using a researcher-designed instrument (Appendix A.), data was collected from 140 students at the end of their student teaching semester. This data was then sorted by major into four basic groups: Administration/Secondary Education majors (N = 48), Childhood Education majors (N = 61), Special Education majors (N = 22), and Childhood Education/Special Education double majors (N = 9).

On the survey, students were asked to respond to a series of statements on a Likert-type scale. The scale consisted of response ratings of one (1) through nine (9), with one (1) being construed as "Strongly Disagreeing" with the statement, and nine (9) being construed as "Strongly Agreeing" with the statement. All statements on the survey were structured so as to

reflect a uniform reaction position by the student to each. In other words, each statement was worded so that a maximum rating of nine would always reflect a positive position, and a minimum rating of one would always reflect a negative position for the particular statement.

Table 1.

Approximate Hours of Field-Based Experiences by Major

	ADSE (N=48)	CHED (N=61)	SPED (N=22)	CHED/SPED(N=9)
Pre-Admission	24	24	24	24
Post-Admission	20	122	56	86
Directed Teaching	640	640	640	640
Total Clock Hours	684	786	720	750
Total - Base (664)	20	122	56	86

Once raw data had been obtained, it was subjected to statistical procedures using a SYSTAT computer program. Scores for each of the 140 subjects were sorted by major and then entered into the SYSTAT program. A mean score was calculated for each of the twenty five statements. (Appendix B.) These mean scores by major were then subjected to an analysis of variance to determine if there were statistically significant differences between the four groups in their response to each of the twenty five statements. A Tukey matrix of pairwise comparison probabilities was calculated to facilitate graphic comparisons of the scores.

Although statistical comparisons were calculated for each of the twenty five statements, the researchers in this study were most interested in the comparisons among majors for certain of the survey statements. Therefore, we have chosen to discuss only those particular statement comparisons in this presentation.

Statement 1: Overall, my field experiences were a positive influence on my decision to become a teacher.

On this statement, a significant difference was found between Administration and Secondary Education (ADSE) majors with a mean score of 6.563 and Childhood Education (CHED) majors with a mean score of 8.148, as well as between ADSE majors and Special Education (SPED) majors who obtained a mean score of 7.318. In addition, a significant difference was found between CHED/SPED double majors (5.778) and CHED majors. On this particular statement, ADSE majors scores tended to be significantly lower than those for the other majors.

Statement 2: Supervising teachers were good role models for developing my own learning style.

On this statement, ADSE major scores (6.729) were significantly lower than those for CHED majors (7.770), but not significantly lower than SPED (6.995) or CHED/SPED majors (6.889).

Statement 3: Field experiences were directly related to previous course content.

On this statement, ADSE major scores (5.125) were significantly lower than those for CHED majors (6.328), but not significantly lower than SPED (5.091) or CHED/SPED majors (6.693).

Statement 5: Overall, field experiences were a valuable part of my preparation for student teaching.

The reaction to this statement was significantly lower for ADSE (5.646), SPED (6.545), and CHED/SPED majors (5.778) than for CHED majors (7.869).

Statement 7: The variety of field experiences was adequate preparation for student teaching.

On this statement, student response indicated a significant difference between ADSE (5.208) and SPED (5.000) majors and those students majoring in CHED (7.115).

Statement 12: Field experiences provided me with a good foundation for student teaching.

Again, ADSE (4.646) majors responded to this statement with significantly lower scores as compared to CHED majors (7.016).

Statement 15: UCA field experience coordinators were helpful in arranging my field experiences.

There was no statistically significant differences found among any of the majors on this particular statement.

Statement 16: Overall, field experiences provided me with an opportunity to consider my own feelings toward teaching as a profession.

There were no significant differences found among majors for this statement. Mean scores by major ranged from 6.333 (CHED/SPED) to 8.000 (CHED) on this statement.

Statement 17: The amount of time spent in field experiences was adequate classroom exposure to prepare me for student teaching.

Significantly lower scores were presented by ADSE majors (4.917) as compared to CHED majors (6.426) on this statement.

Statement 19: Field experiences were enhanced because of meaningful feedback by my supervising teacher.

Significant difference was found only between ADSE majors (4.894) and CHED majors (6.574) for this statement.

Statement 20: Previous UCA course content was adequate preparation for field experiences.

Significant difference was found only between ADSE majors (5.190) and CHED majors (6.490).

Statement 21: Travel time to field placements was justified by the quality of the experiences in the classroom.

This statement was of particular interest to the researchers since students were required to travel considerable distances in order to participate in field experiences in an urban setting. While all mean scores by major tended to be on the low side (4.042 - 5.738), the only significant difference was again found between ADSE majors (4.042) and CHED majors (5.738).

Statement 25: Field experiences were directly linked to the course in which the assignments were made.

Significantly lower scores were found for the ADSE majors (5.000) as compared to the CHED majors (6.672) on this statement.

The student survey was constructed so as to reflect a pattern of responses for five factors which were of interest to the researchers. These five factors were **Placement, Teacher, Feedback, Amount, and Value**. Each of the factors was measured by five survey statements which were assigned a random position on the survey. The SYSTAT system was used to sort the survey items into the five component groups for purposes of a comparison of means by major. (Appendix C.)

As one might suspect from the previous discussion of research findings, the only statistically different factor in this comparison was between ADSE majors and CHED majors. There was a significantly lower mean for ADSE on all of the five factors.

Summary Statements:

As a result of this descriptive study, several general conclusions seem to be apparent.

These conclusions have been summarized in the following statements:

1. The lowest number of hours of required field experience is found among students pursuing initial teacher certification in Secondary Education.
2. The highest number of hours of required field experience is found among students pursuing initial teacher certification in Childhood Education.
3. There appears to be a positive correlation between student reaction to field experience and the number of hours required. In other words, Childhood Education students, as a group, tend to view the various components and requirements of field experience in a more positive way than do other teacher education students.
4. Statements on the student survey which reflected student satisfaction with UCA supervision indicated no apparent difference of treatment among students of each major. This finding would support the pre-study perception that all students were placed, supervised, and advised equally. Mean group scores for these items were consistently high.
5. Scores on the various factors of Placement, Teacher Supervision, Feedback, Amount, and Value were generally reflective of the mean scores by major for both the individual statements on the survey, and overall mean scores by major.
6. A low number of subjects for the CHED/SPED group (N =9) probably tended to contaminate the mean scores by major for that group.

The researchers will replicate this study in December of 1995 with an additional group of students who are currently completing their student teaching assignments.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A.

UCA FIELD EXPERIENCE SURVEY

THIS SURVEY IS DESIGNED TO ASSIST IN DETERMINING STUDENT REACTIONS TO FIELD EXPERIENCE AS A REQUIRED COMPONENT OF THE TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAM AT UCA. YOUR COOPERATION IN COMPLETING THE SURVEY IS APPRECIATED. PLEASE BE HONES IN RESPONDING...TAKE YOUR TIME...CONSIDER EACH STATEMENT CAREFULLY.

DIRECTIONS: READ EACH STATEMENT CAREFULLY, THEN CHOOSE THE POINT ON YOUR ANSWER SHEET CONTINUUM WHICH BEST DESCRIBES YOUR REACTION TO THE STATEMENT. NOTE THAT A RANKING OF "1" WOULD CORRESPOND WITH A "STRONGLY DISAGREE" REACTION, AND A RANKING OF "9" WOULD CORRESPOND WITH A "STRONGLY AGREE" REACTION. A RANKING OF "5" WOULD DENOTE A "NEUTRAL" REACTION TO THE STATEMENT.

1. Overall, my field experiences were a positive influence on my decision to become a teacher.
2. Supervising teachers were good role models for developing my own teaching style.
3. Field experiences were directly relevant to previous course content.
4. Supervising teachers at the placement schools provided adequate supervision of my field experiences.
5. Overall, field experiences were a valuable part of my preparation for student teaching.
6. Field experience placements were scheduled to make the most efficient use of my supervising teacher's time.
7. The **variety** of field experiences was adequate preparation for student teaching.
8. Field experience placements were scheduled with supervising teachers who were capable of making the field experience meaningful.
9. The field experience placement in an **urban** setting was relevant and useful preparation for student teaching.
10. Field experience objectives and assignments were relevant and meaningful.
11. Field experience placements were scheduled to make the most efficient use of my time.
12. Field experiences provided me with a good foundation for student teaching.

13. Supervising teachers were respected by the students in their classrooms.
14. The field experience in a **rural** setting was relevant and useful preparation for student teaching.
15. UCA field experience coordinators were helpful in arranging my field experiences.
16. Overall, field experiences provided me with an opportunity to consider my own feelings toward teaching as a profession.
17. The amount of **time** spent in field experiences was adequate classroom exposure to prepare me for student teaching.
18. Overall, field experiences provided me with ideas which I could incorporate into my own teaching style.
19. Field experiences were enhanced because of meaningful feedback by my supervising teachers.
20. Previous UCA course content was adequate preparation for field experiences.
21. Travel time to field placements was justified by the quality of the experience in the classroom.
22. The field experience in a **suburban** setting was relevant and useful preparation for student teaching.
23. Field experiences were enhanced because of meaningful feedback provided by my UCA instructors.
24. Field experience placements were scheduled in a classroom which offered opportunity for me to learn.
25. Field experiences were directly linked to the course in which the assignments were made.

APPENDIX B.

MEAN SCORE BY ITEM AND MAJOR

ITEM #	ADSE (N=48)	CHED (N=61)	SPED (N=22)	CHED/SPED (N=9)	TOTAL (N=140)
1.	6.563	8.148	7.318	5.778	7.321
2.	6.729	7.770	6.955	6.889	7.229
3.	5.125	6.328	5.091	5.889	5.693
4.	6.292	7.541	6.818	6.333	6.921
5.	5.646	7.869	6.545	5.778	6.764
6.	5.479	6.967	6.273	6.889	6.343
7.	5.208	7.115	5.000	5.556	6.029
8.	5.354	7.082	6.091	7.222	6.343
9.	5.583	7.131	6.273	5.556	6.364
10.	5.021	6.803	5.318	5.778	5.893
11.	4.458	6.525	5.682	5.566	5.621
12.	4.646	7.016	5.591	5.778	5.900
13.	6.833	7.836	7.091	7.556	7.357
14.	5.938	7.066	7.091	6.556	6.650
15.	6.896	7.689	7.455	6.778	7.321
16.	6.708	8.000	7.435	6.333	7.364
17.	4.917	6.426	5.500	4.222	5.621
18.	6.229	7.639	6.818	5.778	6.907
19.	4.894	6.574	6.045	5.667	5.863
20.	5.190	6.490	5.499	5.670	5.760
21.	4.042	5.738	4.418	4.444	4.929
22.	5.417	6.869	6.000	5.333	6.136
23.	4.540	6.300	6.320	5.330	5.640
24.	5.396	5.396	6.545	6.444	6.338
25.	5.000	6.672	5.545	6.222	5.893

APPENDIX C.**MEAN SCORES BY FACTOR AND MAJOR**

FACTOR	ADSE (N=48)	CHED (N=61)	SPED (N=22)	CHED/SPED (N=9)
PLACEMENT	5.520	6.790	6.160	6.020
TEACHER	6.000	7.360	6.600	6.170
FEEDBACK	4.980	6.520	5.460	5.780
AMOUNT	5.413	6.921	5.973	5.444
VALUE	5.958	7.734	6.745	5.889